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5/2/61

I want to talk with you this morning about future policy toward Cuba. In the wake of recent events, this question has been somewhat misunderstood. That is natural, but it is time for clarity.

I will not take time for any further rehash of the past. You are yourselves quite sufficiently active in that. As I predicted in our last meeting, you have heard -- and some of you have written -- a vast amount which is not all accurate. ~~It~~ remains visible that there were failures of prediction and communication and judgment -- and when I have General Taylor's report there will be remedial action. In some instances there will be changes of leadership -- not because we seek scapegoats but because when fresh policies and attitudes are needed, fresh leaders will be essential. We must disentangle and clarify responsibilities, and we must bear steadily in mind the larger interests of freedom as well as the urgent claims of particular groups in particularly unpleasant local situations. But this is as good a time as any to say that there will be no vindictiveness as long as I can prevent it. Final responsibility remains my own.

~~But~~ What is important now is the shape of the future. What do we do now about Cuba? I have had a lot of advice on this point in recent days -- but not all of it has been good. ~~Too many of us, I find, think that these~~ ~~harsh questions require harsh answers.~~ That strong free men should

despise the Castro tyranny is natural and good, but let me assure <sup>all</sup> you, ~~my~~ fellow Americans, that the interests of freedom would not be served today by outright war on Castro, or by a naval blockade -- which is only a somewhat less effective form of war -- or by any other petulant response born of a temporary setback. Such action would be gravely misunderstood among our friends abroad, and it would play into the hands of the Communists, who would gladly sacrifice the Cuban <sup>pawn</sup> ~~plan~~ against America's good name. ~~Cuba is not that sort of problem, and~~ Action of that kind would only <sup>indicate</sup> ~~prove~~ that we did not mean it when we said that Cuba's independence and freedom are centrally a problem for Cubans.

It is true, of course, as I pointed out two weeks ago, that in particular circumstances we might find ourselves forced to take drastic action. The folly of an armed attack on us -- or the emergence of a clear effort by Castro's Soviet masters to turn that unhappy island into an offensive base against us -- these would require action on our part. I have noted with satisfaction Premier Khrushchev's assurance that he has no such intention; the assurance came in a message which is otherwise not wholly reliable, so that we shall have to keep watch for ourselves -- but that can readily be done.

Castro may also turn toward military aggression against other states in the Caribbean; in this respect, the levels of his arms shipments

from abroad are serious, and vigilance will certainly be needed.

But this too is a threat we can readily control, in cooperation with our Caribbean neighbors.

But in a sense the largest lesson of the affair is that this particular episode, which grew out of a timetable of plans and hopes that goes back many months, and which developed a kind of momentum of its own apart from other events, is not a good guide, in and of itself, to understanding. It may seem to suggest a level of urgency and danger in the Cuban situation which does not in fact exist. In the turmoil of two weeks ago, when angry threats were being made by others, it was important to restate the strong position of this country against foreign-dominated totalitarianism -- but these words must not be misunderstood to mean that we are on the warpath. Cuba is not that sort of problem.

If military action by the United States becomes necessary to deal with either of these two threats, <sup>it will be taken.</sup> ~~we shall act on our own judgment if the threat is aimed directly at us, and in cooperation with our neighbors if the threat is aimed at them.~~ But we shall never resort to such action merely because <sup>a</sup> ~~in~~ a particular effort to help free men <sup>has</sup> ~~we have~~ been set back -- that is not the response of a great people.

This does not mean that we ~~can~~ look with complacency on the present situation in Cuba, or that we <sup>will</sup> ~~can~~ abandon the thousands of refugees who

are now among us. We cannot directly or indirectly give aid or comfort to a regime so near our shores and so far from freedom, ~~and further restrictions on trade with Cuba will soon be announced.~~ We cannot neglect our obligation to Cubans who have fled to us from despotism, and I shall ask the Congress for legislation broadening our power to help them during their time of exile, to live and work in peace among us.

Finally, ~~those who wish still to work in the historic ways of~~ resisters for freedom will not find us their enemies. [We shall hope to <sup>work</sup> ~~treat~~ with them in ways that properly and genuinely advance the cause of the Cuban resistance -- but not by any U. S. invasion.]

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Beyond this, we must not let Cuba distract us, in the Americas, from our real business. This small but noisy despotism, slipping under foreign control, requires watchful readiness and steadfast opposition; it does not require war. The most serious misunderstanding of recent events -- and one which owes much to foolish noises from Communists -- is to suppose that they either reflect or require any American view that warlike action is what matters most. This is what the Communists would like, and what they would like others to believe. It is a lie; the opposite is the case. From the very beginning this Administration has steered away from that course, not toward it. From the very start of my service as President I have felt, as one must feel in this office, the requirement of restraint, and patience which

rests upon our people as the leaders of freedom. Exactly because we must be firm in our readiness to fight for freedom where the ground is clear and the requirement definite, we must never commit ourselves simply on our own sense of outrage. No one who looks at Cuba and the United States is likely to mistake restraint for weakness. And in the larger framework there must be equal understanding that the United States remains determined, without noisy protestation, to stand with those who stand up for themselves against the totalitarian imperialism.

Meanwhile there is constructive work to be done, and it is urgent. One lesson of this recent mishap is that the best time to help Cuba was many years ago. We must go forward with greater energy now, when it is late, to reinforce the men who are working for progress and freedom, together, in this great hemisphere. Our Alliance for Progress must be reinforced by a common energy in resisting the wily and unscrupulous agents of Communism -- but most of all we must be on guard against shortsightedness of our own. No merely commercial interest, no merely sentimental pride, can be allowed to stand between us and a generous partnership with all free Americans. In the coming weeks we expect to have vigorous consultation with our friends in the Americas, and I plan to offer a somewhat larger and more varied program of action and appropriation for the Alliance for Progress. We shall work with all our friends to make America fulfill her own high promise -- in

the revolution of the free.

This, and not the nuisance of Castro, is the proper center of our attention for the future.